



FRIENDS OF OCEAN GROVE NATURE RESERVE • OCTOBER 2023



*Silvereye, OGNR, 23 September 2023. Photo: Margaret Alcorn*

### Editor's note

This month's spring issue focuses on the birds, butterflies and frogs of the Reserve. Jen Carr describes the fascinating nesting habits of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo; Barry Lingham provides a fabulous overview of the Ocean Grove frog scene and we republish a 2001 article by Ray Hodge on the Common Brown Butterfly. Also included is the first in a series of short profiles on visitors to the Reserve.

And please welcome FOGNR's new committee members and office bearers who will be representing us for the next three years. See inside for their roles. Thanks to those who came to the AGM and voted.

We will be holding our end-of-year function on Saturday 2 December this year, at 8.30am – a walk followed by presentations of three life memberships then morning tea.

Hope to see you there.

Barbara Spiller

## Birds of the OGNR : Fan-tailed Cuckoo

*By Jen Carr*



*Fan-tailed Cuckoo Photo: Jen Carr*

The Fan-tailed Cuckoo's call, which consists of a series of descending trills, is the sound that for many is synonymous with the start of spring. I went for a walk in the OGNR at the start of September specifically to try and spot a few Fan-tailed Cuckoos, and while I didn't see any, I heard a few individuals calling. Cuckoos are prominent in springtime when the male cuckoos want to be seen and heard by potential mates. They favour woodland habitats, which means that the OGNR is an ideal environment for these birds.

Fan-tailed Cuckoos have a grey back and wings, with pale rufous underparts and a barred white and black tail. They have a prominent yellow eye ring. Females have paler underparts with faint stripes along the sides.

Fan-tailed Cuckoos may be found around the Bellarine throughout the year. A few individuals may be found over winter in the southern areas. Most of these birds move to the tropics of Northern Australia, New Guinea and nearby islands in about February and return to southern Australia to breed from July to February. Fan-tailed Cuckoos in Tasmania migrate to the mainland in the non-breeding season.

Cuckoos are brood parasites, which means that they lay their eggs in the nests of small birds such as scrub wrens, fairy wrens, flycatchers, honeyeaters and thornbills, and these birds unwittingly feed and care for the hatchling cuckoos. Male cuckoos sometimes distract the host species of birds while the female lays her eggs in the host's nest. A single egg is laid in the nest and usually the

cuckoo removes the host's eggs from the nest at the same time. Sometimes the host species will detect the eggs of a cuckoo, and abandon the nest. If this does not happen and the host species lays eggs in the nest with the cuckoo eggs, and the cuckoo hatches first, the cuckoo hatchling pushes the other eggs or hatchlings from the host species out of the nest.

The cuckoo hatchling grows to several times the size of the host chicks and looks nothing like the host hatchlings. Even birds other than the hosts have been observed feeding young cuckoos. The host loses out twice, in that their own young are disposed of, and they lose an entire season feeding the stranger, at great cost to themselves. I've seen several instances of thornbills feeding large hatchling cuckoos in the OGNR.

The Fan-tailed Cuckoo enjoys hairy caterpillars in its diet, but will also take a variety of other insects and their larvae. Food is located from an exposed perch and is seized in flight or from the ground. The bird returns to its perch to consume its prey.

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## AGM and new Committee

Every three years we need to elect new office bearers to the FOGNR Committee and 2023 was such a year.

Our AGM was held at the Reserve on Sunday 20 August at 9am with morning tea to follow.

We now have several new office bearers plus seven other committee members.

- President – Chris Pitfield
- Vice-President - Barry Lingham
- Secretary - Beth Ross (Mark Harwood will check email and draft minutes of meetings)
- Treasurer - Terry Fahey
- Activities Co-ordinator - Beth Ross with assistance from Pete Sullivan and Lel Shipley
- Committee Members - Jennifer Carr, Virginia Cooke, Andrea Dennett, Mark Harwood, Suzanne Hudgell, Pete Sullivan, Fiona Topolsanyi

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## Networking and connections

[Geelong Sustainability newsletter – September 2023](#)

[Bellarine Landcare Group newsletter September 2023](#)

[Friends of the Barwon newsletter August 2023](#)

# Some Frogs of the OGNR and the Frog Walk in September

*By Barry Lingham*

There are about 200 species of frogs in Australia, of which 36 have been found in Victoria. The Ocean Grove Nature Reserve has four commonly found species plus some other rare or threatened species. Recently, Sophie Small and Bernie Malone from Bellarine Landcare Group organised a Frog Walk at the OGNR as part of the Geelong Nature Festival. Four FOGNR committee members (Beth, Andrea, Suzanne and I) assisted by showing members of the public around the wetland zones.

About 30 people including many families with children braved the cool evening and our friendly mosquitoes. Many had already downloaded the very useful Frog ID app that is freely available at the Australian museum website:

<https://www.frogid.net.au/>

Frog ID is a fantastic resource and it does two jobs. Firstly, you can access photos, distribution maps and, most importantly, recordings of all Australian frogs. It is possible to apply a filter to restrict the species to those known to occur in your region.

Secondly, you can stand with your phone at site where frogs are calling and make a 20 second recording of the calls.. A simple button push sends your name, the time and location plus the recording, to the museum where the call is analysed. The species is then identified by the call and that full observation data is stored as a permanent record. You receive the information about the species you recorded. It is amazing technology.

The visitors walked the Currawong Trail to where a small bridge crosses over the water course. Some Bibron's Toadlets have been heard there in the past, but not on the evening of our Frog Walk. Bibron's Toadlet is listed as an endangered species on the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee. They have a quiet "cricket, cricket, cricket" call with pauses between sounds. Just after the first autumn rains is often a good time to try and detect this rare frog.



*Photo: Lel Shipley*

We then walked back in the dark to the main central dam where many Common Eastern Froglets were heard calling. Despite many people searching by torch-light, we could not get a glimpse of


the noisy frogs. A few Southern Brown Tree Frogs were also heard. As we walked back to the Information Centre, the last of the group found a Spotted Marsh Frog beside the track so we had some success in our search despite the cold conditions.

### More about frogs

Frogs are ectothermic vertebrates (cold blooded, with a skeleton) and they have a thin skin that can absorb and expel water. Many frogs can use their skin as a secondary breathing organ to supplement oxygen from their lungs. They must keep the skin moist, so many frogs burrow into the soil, or move under rocks and vegetation during dry weather. Their skin may also secrete toxic chemicals that can irritate humans. Humans can also spread diseases to frogs, so it is recommended that frogs are only handled by people using special plastic gloves.

Male frogs call from the edge of a wet zone to court females. If the male is successful in attracting a female, she will approach and the pair clasp together. Spawning then occurs. The female lays many eggs in the water and the male releases sperm to fertilise them. In a few days or weeks the eggs hatch into tadpoles. Tadpoles have gills for breathing underwater and a tail to help them swim. They feed on microscopic plant life in the water and slowly metamorphose into frogs. They begin to grow legs and the tail is slowly absorbed into the body. Internally, lungs begin to develop and the digestive tract changes to enable the animal to eat insects. Eventually, the tadpole has changed into a frog and it is ready to leave the water, hopping or crawling over the land to find food and a sheltered place to live.

### Four frog species commonly found in Ocean Grove

<p><b>Southern Brown Tree Frog</b> <i>Litoria ewingi</i></p> 	<p>Like all tree frogs, this species has sticky pads on the ends of its toes. It can be found in urban gardens. It is a good jumper and can catch insects in flight.</p> <p>They are up to 45mm long, usually brownish but sometimes with bright green markings. In hot dry periods, they may crawl under rocks or grass tussocks to avoid drying out.</p> <p>After rain, the males prefer to perch on a stick or rock above the water to make their call of “creeeeee, creee, creee, cree, cree cree”</p>
<p><b>Pobblebonk</b> <i>Limnodynastes dumerili</i></p>	<p>Also known as the Banjo Frog. Adults can grow to 80mm long. The “bonk” call sound like a banjo note. When many males are calling at once, the noise level can be very loud.</p> <p>After rain, these frogs can be found</p>



moving around at night, hunting insects or other invertebrates.

The markings are quite variable, from brown to grey with streaks and blotches. Some adults have bright yellow throats. There is usually a pale stripe from the eye to above the arm.

In dry times, they burrow into soil to preserve their moisture.

**Spotted Marsh Frog** *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*



This is a smaller frog, growing to 45mm long. The call is a single “plock” like two rocks striking together. If many are calling together, it can sound like a continuous clicking. They are usually found close to water.

Markings are variable. There is usually a central back stripe that is pale, orange or reddish. A series of blotches can usually be seen on the body and legs.

It moves into cracks in the soil or under rocks during hot weather.

**Eastern Common Froglet** *Crinia signifera*



This small froglet is the most commonly heard species locally. It only grows to around 35mm. It tends to be a slimmer, flatter body shape than other local frogs. Colouring is variable between individuals. The pale belly is granular with black or brown mottling.

The call has been likened to winding an old watch – “crickcrick, crickcrick, crickcrick”.

There are several other less-common species of frogs that may occur locally. Peron’s Tree Frog, the Whistling Tree Frog, the Southern Toadlet and the Growling Grass Frog are possible species in this area.

# The Common Brown Butterfly

By Ray Hodge

Ray Hodge was a naturalist and an active member of the Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. He wrote a regular column in 'The Whistler' titled 'In the Reserve'. This article was originally published in November 2001.

We republish it now as the Common Browns are about to make their annual appearance in the Reserve. I wonder how they compare to the numbers Ray was observing 22 years ago?

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## Common brown butterflies have serious work to do

OF all the small creatures of the Nature Reserve, *Metronympha merope* appears to live an entirely butterfly existence - aimless, irrelevant, free of responsibility and entirely lacking in direction. As *Metronympha* is a butterfly, this is perhaps not surprising.

Vast numbers of them will shortly appear in the Reserve, flitting throughout the bush, along the tracks, over the grasslands - everywhere. Cinnamon-orange in colour, with darker markings and reddish spots, they are commonly called Common Browns, rather a boring name and certainly an understatement.

Beneath their seemingly frivolous existence is another story altogether. In mid-November, the first of the later myriads will appear, slightly smaller and more colourful than those to come. These are all males, which immediately set about securing a territory where later female arrivals may lay their eggs. This process is a serious and arduous business indeed - a suitable environment must be identified and intruders be challenged and driven off.

About three weeks later the female butterflies emerge in great numbers. Mating takes place and territories are

occupied. The males, their mission accomplished, decline dramatically in numbers until almost all disappear, few if any surviving the summer.

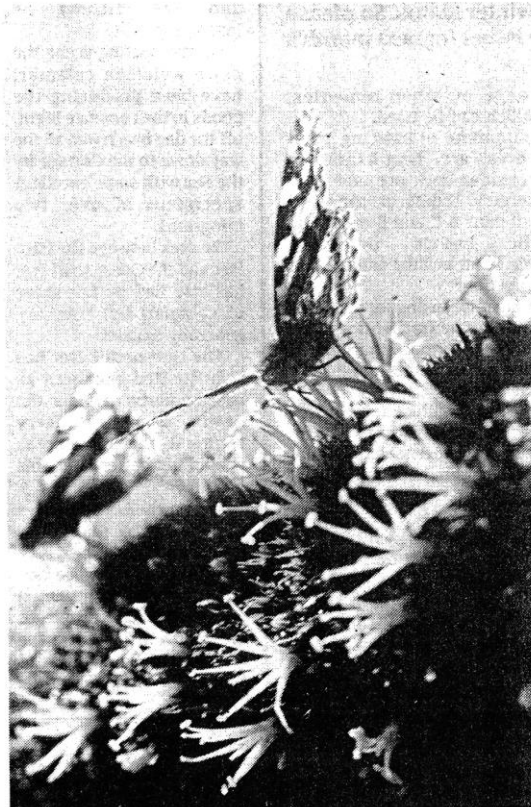
The females commence laying their eggs soon after - not thousands at a time



placed on the vegetation as might be expected, but one at a time, each upon an individual blade of grass. This provides the complete food supply for the caterpillar, which hatches and reaches pupa stage some weeks later.

As the summer passes, the numbers increase until some years it is impossible to walk anywhere through the reserve without literally brushing these gentle insects out of your path. Cooler weather sees the numbers decline rapidly until by about April, a few tattered or damaged individuals are all that remain.

Some people have reported common browns gather together in selected trees,



*Common Brown butterflies feeding upon flowers of a grass tree in the Nature Reserve. - Photo by Gordon McCarthy.*

sheltering from the elements or the darkness in huge numbers in rather the same manner as similar though larger butterflies, the wanderers, do in the Northern Hemisphere. All this activity coincides with the blossoming of the bush, particularly the flowering of the grass trees, which

doubtless provides a supply of food energy through the nectar flow. Whatever the case, the seemingly aimless, carefree butterfly existence of the common browns is, to them, a serious business, a matter of life and death no less important than it is to the rest of the living things which share this planet.

## Reserve visitors : Tim and Amber

*By Barbara Spiller*

On a sunny Thursday afternoon in the school holidays I came across teachers Tim and Amber taking the opportunity of some time to themselves while their three children were being babysat, to have a walk in the Reserve. They are regular visitors to the Reserve and on that occasion had chosen the Banksia Trail, which is one of their favourite walks. They usually come to the Reserve with their children aged 11, 9 and 7 and the whole family walks the perimeter of the Reserve. The kids love playing on the island; Tim likes it when they come across a wallaby at dusk and Amber's favourite animal experience is the frog calls. They remarked on how sad it was to see the grass trees looking so diseased compared to healthy specimens elsewhere on the Bellarine.

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### FOGNR Activities 2023

#### October

Friday 20 10am Working Bee (meet at Info Centre)

Saturday 21 1pm Wildflower Walk with Bernie Lingham  
(meet at carpark inside Grubb Rd entrance)

#### November

Friday 17 10am Working Bee (meet at Info Centre)

Date TBC Moth Night with Peter Marriott

#### December

Saturday 2 8.30am Walk then Life Membership Presentations then Morning Tea

Friday 15 10am Working Bee (meet at Info Centre)

Check FOGNR Facebook for up-to-date information about activity arrangements

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/34794023030/>

## Contact details

**Email:** [friends.oceangrove.naturereserve@gmail.com](mailto:friends.oceangrove.naturereserve@gmail.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/34794023030/>

**Web:** <https://fognr.wordpress.com/friends/>

**Mail:** Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve, PO Box 313, OCEAN GROVE 3226

We acknowledge the traditional owners of Wadawurrung Country and pay our respects to their elders and people, past and present, as we do to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people everywhere.



